

WHAT WE STAND FOR

**Four questions of
revolutionary
socialism**

**NATIONAL QUESTION
WOMEN**

TRADE UNIONS

RUSSIA

60p

A Socialist Worker pamphlet

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WHAT WE STAND FOR

Four questions of revolutionary socialism

INTRODUCTION

OVER the last few years, it has become clear to many that a profound crisis affects the system under which we all live. Throughout the world governments in many countries totter on the brink of bankruptcy, famine has become endemic for millions of people and wars threaten the future of millions.

In Ireland, North and South, factories that a few short years ago were heralded as the saviour of Irish backwardness, now stand closed with grass growing up through the floor.

Joblessness, short-time working, poverty, lack of housing and despair seem to be the lot of increasing numbers. In the North, the authorities have no solutions—save more repression. And in that repression, the Southern rulers are collaborating more and more.

We, in the Socialist Workers Movement, believe that only revolutionary Marxism can develop the politics necessary to meet this situation. To that end we are striving to build a party dedicated to—in Marx's words—the self-emancipation of the working class.

Many readers of our monthly paper "Socialist Worker" would like to know more about our politics in greater detail than space permits in an article in a paper. To this end we have produced in-depth articles on four central questions for socialists in Ireland: The National Question; The Trade Unions; Women and the Russian-type states.

Although written by individual authors, each article is the outcome of discussion within the SWM and represents the collective view of that organisation. A shorter, duplicated version of this pamphlet appeared in 1984, but the encouraging demand decided us to expand and improve the material ready for this printed version.

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1 Revolutionary socialism and trade unions

Revolutionary socialists distinguish themselves by one central point: they identify the working class as the one class in history that is capable of its own liberation. Oppression and privilege have existed as long as the existence of class society. But until the arrival of the working class, all previous oppressed groups were doomed to switch one ruler for another.

Why is the modern working class different? In the first place capitalism itself organises workers to fight against it collectively. Furthermore, they can only achieve their freedom together. The small Irish peasant of the last century on occasion fought together in movements such as the Land League. But the aim of the peasant was to become a bigger peasant and a small farmer. Workers cannot dismantle the system of production and share it out individually—they can only control production collectively.

There is a second reason. The fantastic wealth that that is produced in the system—a wealth that sees billions in banks, in shares, in the money circulated in all types of speculation—rests on only one source. Namely the exploitation of workers in industry. That also means that the organisation of workers at the point of production concentrates power in their hands. A negative example of that power was demonstrated in recent years with the Ulster Workers Council strike. Within days of this reactionary strike all the well laid power-sharing plans of the British and Irish Governments were torn to shreds. But that same power can also be turned to other ends—to win the freedom of working people.

The first organisations that were thrown up by workers in the struggle against exploitation were trade unions. The trade unions may best be characterised as the basic defence organisations of workers under capitalism. They are defence organisations because their very existence challenges the untrammelled rights of the boss to set the conditions

and wages at work. But the unions are also shaped by the very system—capitalism—under which they operate. Their aim is to set the price at which labour is exploited, rather than the abolition of exploitation. They organise workers to master the capitalist market. As a result dockers organise with dockers; clerical workers with clerical workers, and so on. Despite the famous union slogan “an injury to one is an injury to all”, the unions are built to fight the sectional struggles of particular groups of workers.

Their aim is negotiation rather than struggle. This is not a criticism of the mass of trade unionists, it is merely a description of how workers’ organisation under capitalism is necessarily shaped by the system.

There does, however, develop within the unions a layer that develops a professional interest in an accommodation with the employers and the state. The modern trade union bureaucrat has about as much in common with the founders of the trade union movement as the modern Papacy has with the activities of the revolutionary Palestinian carpenter that gave his name to Christianity. Connolly’s and Larkin’s attitude to the union struggle could best be summarised in this little motto from Connolly:

“Let me emphasise the point that the greatest weapon against Capital was proven in these days to be the sporadic strike. It was its very sporadic nature, its swiftness and unexpectedness that won. It was ambush, the surprise attack of our industrial army before which the well trained battalions of the Capitalists crumpled up in panic.”

Connolly and Larkin were revolutionary leaders of a union that saw as its objective the overthrow of capitalism. They organised in a period when the

structure for the accomodation of union leaders did not exist. Hence they stresses the rank-and-file initiative in organising struggle, the total lack of "procedures" by which class struggle should be conducted and the necessity of *not* sticking to binding agreements with the employers.

Now, consider the union bureaucrat. In the first place their position means a major degree of isolation from the union members and a marked privilege over those they claim to represent. The vast majority of union officials are unelected—they are appointed to a career. Those who are elected usually hold office for life. Their pay is often twice the average pay of those they represent. The members exercise little control over their activities—either in negotiations or how they conduct strikes.

Second, the union official develops a professional interest in negotiation and procedures. For the bureaucrat considers that it is his negotiating skills rather than the activities of the rank-and-file which win gains. Once the negotiations have been concluded the official has a professional interest in insisting that agreements with the bosses are adhered to. The creation and continued existence of negotiating machinery depends on a degree of trust. The official has to develop that trust with the employer and insist that his members stick to the bargain. Literally, his job depends on it.

The result is a conservative bureaucracy at the top of the union that stifles the activities and struggle of the rank-and-file. Procedure, arbitration, the Labour Court machinery becomes everything. The confidence at shop floor level is relegated to second place.

To the general picture sketched above we must add two qualifications. The union bureaucracy is not part of the state machine—or indeed an ally of the boss. The union official is forced to defend the very existence of the union organisation against the employers at times. His position depends on the continued existence of the union structure. Instead the bureaucracy operates as a buffer between the rank-and-file and capitalism. They express the promise of accomodation with they system.

Within the bureaucracy splits develop. There are left and right wing officials who disagree on the extent of accomodation and compromise. Des Geraghty, Matt Merrigan or Phil Flynn are prepared to sanction more action than the right wing hacks of the

Labour Party who dominate some unions. As revolutionaries, the Socialist Workers Movement *does* at all times call for a vote for left wing officials against right wing officials. But we do so for one reason, they allow more of an opening to the rank-and-file to take the initiative itself—to win, for example, official sanction for the struggle. For us it is not the particular brand of reformist policy of the union leader that counts, it is the opening it gives to militants on the shop floor.

For that reason, although we may vote for them, we argue that there should be absolutely no reliance placed on them. We recognise that, no matter how left wing their rhetoric, they are still part of a layer whose interests lie in accomodation. Left officials sell out the rank-and-file—they dare not organise over the heads of their more right wing colleagues. Above all, they too put their professional interests in negotiations above the initiatives and confidence of the rank-and-file. Ultimately they do so because they accept the inevitability and permanence of capitalism.

The trade union leadership are instinctively reformist. It is for that reason that they insist on the separation of politics and industrial activity. That separation can be seen crudely at work in those trade unions where political discussion is banned. But most manual unions do allow political discussion. The separation operates differently. For although trade unionists may discuss and pass many fine sounding left wing resolutions, there is no way they can seek to have them implemented *as organised workers*. The political issues are supposed to be resolved by individually voting for TDs from parties who promise to carry out the necessary reforms. Every union executive that is mandated to pressure the state for reforms invariably reports that it implemented the resolution by writing a letter or having meetings with a government minister. If the right response is not forthcoming, it is a question of electing a different government.

The disastrous results of that tradition were to be most clearly seen on the tax issue. Upwards of half a million workers struck and took to the streets to demand tax reform. The strength was there to force the bosses to pay up from profits and ease the PAYE burden on workers. But the union leaders threw it away. They blamed their own rank-and-file for not electing the right government. They failed

to lead the struggle forward by a policy of deepening and developing the use of political strike action. Why? Because the union leaders believe that politics must be left to the TDs in the Dail. They reject any tradition that would undermine the authority of the Dail by the determined use of political strike action.

Revolutionaries must look on matters differently. For us the slightest of reforms—whether they be changes in the tax code, a better health service or more houses—can only be fought successfully today through the industrial power of workers. Those who demand that we leave politics to parties like the Workers Party or Labour Party invariably condemn us to be passive bystanders waiting for promises to be delivered—they never are.

For that reason, SWM members agitate in the unions to build the fighting capacity and confidence of workers on the shop floor. Our aim is to point out how the smallest of struggles can quickly become political; how political issues themselves can only be fought successfully through the workers themselves organising to win by industrial action; how *that*, at the end of the day, demands a challenge to capitalism, and in particular to the bosses' state. Central to our task is the argument for solidarity. As the system stagnates, it has become more difficult to fight workplace by workplace. Solidarity becomes more crucial.

For that reason the day-to-day task of SWM members in the workplaces is to argue for collections and support for workers on strike. The aim is not just the money. It is the building of a network of militants who understand that they are involved in a *class* battle against the bosses.

As part of its day-to-day agitation, the SWM fights for:

- (i) All strikes for trade union principle to be made official;
- (ii) Total opposition to the two-tier picket;
- (iii) Opposition to the use of the Labour Court;
- (iv) The election of all trade union officials and their payment at average industrial wages.
- (v) Wages: For flat-rate, across-the-board wage increases. For the linking together of wage claims. For total opposition to wages restraint and productivity deals.
- (vi) Unemployment: Opposition to all redundancies. Make the bosses pay for the crisis. Occupation of workplaces to demand nationalisation. A

35 hour week.

- (vii) Shop Floor Organisation: Regular workplace meetings. Reports-back by the shop stewards. For the formation of Joint Shop Steward Committees. Against the emergence of full-time convenors. Share out the facility time between the stewards.
- (viii) Strikes: Conduct of all strikes to be in the hands of an elected strike committee. Regular strike meetings to involve the membership. Work groups to involve every striker in collections, publicity, socials, etc.

Our aim in raising these issues is not to be super trade unionists. We are above all revolutionaries who seek to connect up the immediate struggles with fight for socialism. We fight to build the confidence and militancy of the rank-and-file in action to lead these struggles in the direction of a fight against the bosses and the state.

The revolutionary organisation is almost always in a minority. Because of the dominance of the bosses' ideas, most militants will organise to fight their own boss but fail to see the wider connections. A revolutionary organisation seeks to draw these militants closer to its politics. For that reason we aim to build rank-and-file organisations that are based in the workplace. By rank-and-file organisations we mean the organisation of militant workers around a fighting "minimum" programme. The backbone of such organisation can only be a revolutionary party. It alone has the ability to generalise the struggle and lead it in the direction of a fight against capitalism.

The conditions for such rank-and-file organisations are not immediately present today. Such organisations demand a high degree of struggle where thousands of workers see from their own experiences the need to go beyond the union leaders. They also demand a far greater implantation of revolutionaries in the workplaces than SWM possesses.

Throughout the seventies the system of wage bargaining was National Wage Agreements. The Southern economy was experiencing a mini-boom and the key concern of the bosses was to prevent a explosion of shop-floor power. The NWAs meant that the union leaderships and employers settled the wage increase; that a number of institutions such as the employer/labour conference developed to incorporate the union bureaucracy; the unions were restricted by no-strike clauses. The exceptional right to strike was established only after going

through lengthy procedures involving the Labour Court and applying for the ICTU all-out picket. The NWAs achieved a shifting of power from shop floor to union bureaucracy. The price the bosses paid was indexation—the pegging of wages to price rises.

Today the situation has changed dramatically. The bosses have torn up the NWAs and gone on the offensive. The continuing recession in the system means that they are determined to impose wage cuts. The fear of the dole is now a more effective source of discipline than moderate trade union officials. The rot which set in during the NWAs has made it easier for the bosses.

The task of socialists today is to rebuild the militancy and fight on the shop floor. To do that you must take up political arguments against the “need for sacrifice” and belt-tightening. Above all that means arguing the case for solidarity.

In a period of boom different groups of workers from the same factory could win by fighting separately—then it was the case that general workers came out one month and craft workers the next—and both groups won.

Today every example of sectionalism is a cancer that weakens and destroys. The two tier picket has survived from the days of the NWAs. Socialists have to argue against it constantly. They need to argue the case for solidarity—for strike support, collections, for co-ordination of claims, for sympathetic action.

You cannot build such solidarity without political ideas. Capitalism survives by divide and rule. To overcome these divisions you need a core who understand that it's a class war we're engaged in. The need is for a network of socialist militants throughout the shop floor. And the Socialist Workers Movement is engaged in building that network.

—KIERAN ALLEN

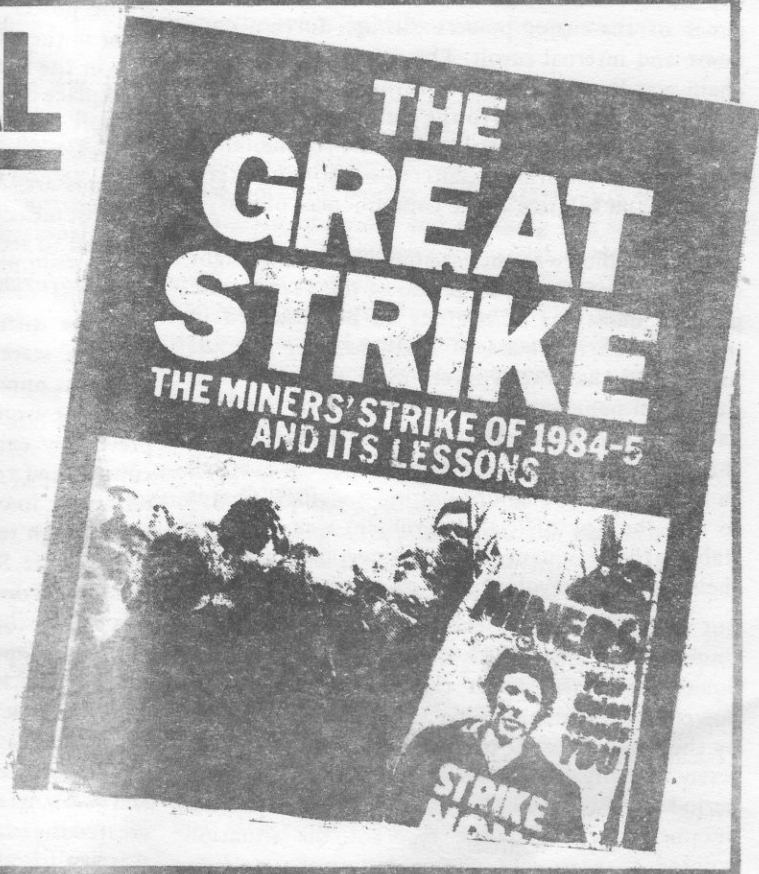
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2 State capitalism in Russia

The Russian Revolution

The First World War signified the huge crisis that racked world capitalism in the early years of this century. Capitalist imperialism had reached a point where competing countries were forced to embroil the world in war for the redistribution of the world for colonies, markets, sources of raw materials, investment opportunities, etc. Further development of capitalist production depended on war which itself threatened the regimes of the major powers through foreign conquest and internal revolt. The weakest link in the chain was Russia where the autocratic rule of the Tsars had not adapted to the forms appropriate to modern capitalism. In early 1917, the regime fell as a result of agitation and disaffection among workers, peasants and soldiers at the consequences of war.

But the rebellion was unconscious—workers thought it would be sufficient to get rid of the Tsar for the pressing questions of the day to be answered in favour of the mass of Russians. They did not understand that the workers must take power in their own name—it took the struggles of the next half year and the leadership of the Bolsheviks for this to become clear. In the mean time power fell to the liberals and compromising socialists. That is to say, the new official government was acting to stabilise the dominance of the bourgeoisie—cloaking their actions in revolutionary rhetoric.

But at the same time the workers' struggles continued. Most importantly the Workers' Councils—Soviets—were the direct expression of workers' power. The leadership of the Soviets was dominated by the compromisers, but the Soviets were the representative organ of working class struggle. It was a period of "dual power". As the months rolled by it became clearer that the logic of the situation pointed to a straight choice—either the workers

would take power and crush the bourgeois power or the bourgeoisie would crush the workers' movement in bloody counter-revolution.

By autumn 1917 the no-compromise trend in the working class predominated. And the party that represented that trend, that had been campaigning since April for "all power to the Soviets"—the Bolsheviks—won a majority in the Soviets. Under the leadership of the Bolsheviks, the Soviets took the whole power, snuffing out the bourgeois government in the October Revolution. The working class was in the saddle. The Soviets—based upon direct workplace democracy where delegates who lost the support of their work-mates could be replaced at a moment's notice—elected the ministers or People's Commissars. And steps were taken to implement socialist measures, to withdraw from the imperialist war and to settle the land question.

The material basis for socialism

But one difficulty stood in the way of the new workers' state. Marx—and all serious Marxists—had held that oppression, exploitation and class society were the necessary consequences of scarcity. All previously existing societies had a level of science, culture and technical competence to allow only a relatively low productivity of labour. There was not enough to go round to ensure everyone a full and free life. Society had to be driven from the top if it was to develop. And the role of the ruling class was to use their control of the surplus to drive up productive powers. Capitalism opened up new possibilities. Because it was such a dynamic system it achieved—with utmost brutality—undreamt of advances in the powers of production. It revolutionised, again and again, the techniques of production and with it every social institution. In short, it created the material prerequisite for a life free from scarcity for all. And it produced the working class

who were to be the agents for ushering in this new society of freedom.

Yet from the point of view of backward Russia in 1917 it just was not true that these material prerequisites existed *inside her borders*. The doctrine of "socialism in one country" was unheard of in the Marxist movement at that time, let alone the possibility of socialism in a backward country like Russia.

The leaders of the Russian Revolution held this perspective: the revolution in Russia would detonate the revolution in other European countries, particularly Germany. The industrial might of the advanced countries, when under the control of workers, would assist Russia's socialist development. This perspective was not unreal. The crisis of capitalism was worldwide: which was why the war was a world war. The regime of the Kaiser in Germany did not survive the 1918 workers' agitation and in every country of Europe the post-war years saw great political upheavals. The Bolsheviks did what they could to advance the prospects of socialism by exporting the revolution in this situation. Most important in this connection was the founding of the Communist International in early 1919. The idea was to create workers' parties around the world that could challenge and replace the sell-out socialist parties which had supported their governments in the War. This International was designed to spread the political accomplishments and experience of the Bolsheviks to the world movement—to create a world party of workers' revolution.

The trouble was that it takes years to build a seasoned and tested revolutionary party and by the time that serious progress had been made the revolutionary wave around Europe had been beaten back.

Isolation and defeat in Russia

Difficulties in Russia became more pressing. Civil War; famine; foreign invasion and isolation cut the ground from under the feet of the revolution. The Bolsheviks were involved in a holding operation, to keep the faltering flame of the first workers' state burning until the revolution abroad brought assistance. But the very social basis of the workers' regime—the organised, conscious working class—was itself decaying. Exhausted, decimated and dispersed, the workers became more passive and the

Bolsheviks found themselves having more and more to substitute their cohesiveness, organisation and power for that of the working class. Because of the low cultural level of the mass of the population—illiteracy was widespread—many ex-officials of the old Tsarist regime were recruited into the service of the young workers' state. And as the civil war was won and the Bolshevik government consolidated its power, many careerists came over to the winning side. Bureaucracy grew apace.

By the early twenties the isolated, impoverished workers' democracy was under severe pressure. The dispersed and passive working class was no longer in a position to dominate society. The bureaucracy on the other hand was increasing its power, prestige and privilege. It inclined toward a "business as usual" attitude rather than the chancey business of international revolution. As the revolutionary tide in Europe ebbed, the only practical proposition as far as the bureaucracy was concerned was to build up industry in Russia to provide the material means of defending her independence in a hostile world.

The rise of Stalinism

This policy required accumulating resources from from production to plough back into building up heavy industry. This meant diverting resources from the consumption of workers and peasants—lowering their standard of living—and applying this surplus to the building of massive industrial complexes. Naturally this economic programme was incompatible with workers' democracy. The mass of Russian workers and peasants had exhausted themselves in the great sacrifices of the previous period. There is no way they could have willingly assented to having their living standards still further cut.

A new regime of squeezing the masses still further meant the complete destruction of workers' power and the dismantling of the power, actual or potential, of the Soviets. And from the late twenties with the first Five Year Plan onwards, this is what happened. From being in the driving seat in Russian society, the workers were cast down to being mere units of production. The bureaucracy became not the instrument of the workers' will but the master of the workers. This Bureaucracy, with its special Party shops, exclusive Black Sea holiday resorts and—more importantly—its monopoly of power, became the new boss class enforcing accumulation.

The political aspect of this phenomenon has gone

down in history as Stalinism. It was Stalin who became the most determined and effective leader of this counter-revolutionary trend. The Great Terror in the countryside, the hysterical "Purges" with the physical liquidation of masses of Party cadre and the spectacular "Show Trials" of the thirties became the political instruments by which Stalin dispersed, liquidated and terrorised all possible opposition. Scarcely a political leader of the Bolsheviks from 1917 survived the thirties.

In the international sphere, the demoralisation after the defeats of the twenties made it possible for Stalin to transform the hitherto revolutionary Communist International into a tame mouthpiece of Kremlin foreign policy. For example, after 1933—when Hitler took power in Germany—Stalin sought to construct alliances with imperialist France and Britain against Germany. To this end, Communist Parties—at the bidding of the Communist International—began agitating for a "Popular Front" where the goal of working class power was abandoned for alliance on almost any terms with sections of the "anti-fascist" ruling class. The murderous and treacherous counter-revolutionary policy of the Comintern in Spain in the mid-thirties amounted to stabbing the Spanish workers and their revolution in the back in order to curry favour with the French bourgeois government.

Had everything been lost?

Trotsky—who practically alone of the old Bolshevik resisted the pressure to conform to Stalinism and who maintained an international socialist revolutionary position—made the first serious attempt to analyse Stalinism and what was happening in Russia from a Marxist point of view. He thought that although Stalin pursued a reactionary policy at home and internationally—which threatened to open the door to the restoration of capitalism—the counter-revolution had not yet actually occurred. The fact that all the means of production were in the hands of the state (private property in industry remained almost entirely eliminated), Trotsky reasoned, meant that the foundation of the workers' state was still intact. A bureaucratic "clique" had usurped the leading position and because of their corruption of the Soviets, it would require a political revolution to remove them. Nonetheless, for Trotsky, the Stalinist Bureaucracy did not constitute a new ruling class but was a parasitic outgrowth on the surface of the workers' state.

Trotsky thought that the Bureaucracy had no stable roots in the Soviet society—it was a transitional phenomenon which could not survive a crisis like war. Very soon either the workers would re-assert their authority or Russia would be overrun by imperialism. In any event Trotsky excluded the possibility of Stalinism extending and spreading the revolution. For that reason he sought after 1933 to assemble the forces to build a new, revolutionary, Fourth International. This is how matters stood when Trotsky was murdered on Stalin's orders in Mexico in 1940.

A necessary re-assessment

By the late forties it was clear that Trotsky had been wrong. Stalinism had weathered the Second World War and emerged stronger. Across eastern Europe stretched states essentially identical to Russia which had been installed by the advancing Red Army—which the workers had taken no part in creating.

To say, as Trotsky had, that some of the essential gains of the 1917 Revolution remained in Russia, that it was a degenerated workers' state, might have appeared plausible in the thirties. But what of Poland, east Germany, Hungary and the rest? There had been no workers' revolution in these countries. Yet they were identical in all essentials of social structure to Russia—nationalised means of production, "Communist" dictatorship, etc., etc.

Only two possibilities existed. *First* that *neither* Poland, etc *nor* Russia were workers' states and Trotsky had been wrong or *second* that *both* Russia *and* the eastern European states were workers' state and it was possible to create a workers' state without workers' revolution and a genuine revolutionary party. And if this alternative was true then all the *essentials* of the revolutionary international socialist marxist tradition that Trotsky had championed from his lonely third exile were false and Stalin had been right after all.

For if Russia was a workers state then the essentially identical states of eastern Europe were workers' states also and Marx had been wrong to say that the emancipation of the working class is the act of the working class; Lenin had been wrong to found an International against the class-collaborationist parties of the Second International and Trotsky had been wrong to describe the Stalinist Communist Parties as counter-revolutionary.

Among Trotsky's followers confusion abounded. The tiny forces of the Fourth International disintegrated. Those who continued to defend Trotsky's "degenerated workers' state" formulation and its variants had theoretically broken the link between workers' actions and socialism. Some drew the logical conclusion of this and gravitated towards an accommodation with Stalinism. Others subsided into impressionism—tailing every fad and fashion in radical politics from third-worldism through student vanguardism to feminism—without any solid support in the realm of ideas for their socialism.

A small group chose the other way. Rejecting the view that the eastern European states could on any reckoning be counted workers' states, they drew the same conclusion for Russia. They recognised that since the rise of Stalinism Russia was no longer a workers' state but a class society—a capitalist society. They developed the theory of Bureaucratic State Capitalism which characterised the Stalinist Bureaucracy as a new ruling class holding, through its control of the state, the means of production. This Bureaucracy maintains itself by exploiting the workers of Russia and similar states for accumulation of capital. The driving force of this capital accumulation is the, principally military, competition between the Russian bloc and the West.

This analysis was systematically carried through and published by Tony Cliff, the founder of what is now the Socialist Workers Party in Britain (our sister organisation) and provides the only theoretical basis upon which Marx's dictum that the emancipation of the working class is the act of the working class; Lenin's struggle to create a revolutionary party and Trotsky's fight against Stalinism can be carried on in the light of developments in the real world.

Why is it important?

It might appear that what you think about Russia makes very little difference to what revolutionaries actually *do* in Ireland. Isn't theoretical disputation about the class nature of the Stalinist states a little beside the point when revolutionaries in Ireland can scarcely count their numbers in three figures? But seductive as these arguments are, they are mistaken. For Marx, Lenin and Trotsky and the other great revolutionaries of our tradition, theory was a guide to action. It was not conceived of as an academic exercise in which intellectuals disputed esoteric questions in a language that excluded the compre-

hension of all but other intellectuals. Revolutionary theory is the accumulated experience of the workers' movement, expressed in a way that has general applicability. It is something we should not treat flippantly, for workers in the past have paid a high price acquiring it. And masses of workers still pay—in Chile, for example—for not having its lessons available to them.

Theory and practice

When workers struggle to change the world they learn, as in any branch of human activity, more about the world. But unlike the natural science which preserve and build upon the accumulated discoveries of the past in constantly developing practice, the workers' struggle is part of a class war where, until the moment of final victory, workers are continually being attacked and subordinated to capitalism. For that reason class struggle is subject to interruptions, is fragmented. The consequence is that under capitalism the worker's horizon is limited to immediate experience. Nobody working today participated in the 1917 Revolution. As part of the living memory of actual workers, the experience has been lost. This is the central reason for the revolutionary party—to be the memory of the class; to generalise beyond the immediate fragmented struggle; to connect the workers' movement of today with the experiences that are separate from it in time and space. To create (or rather re-create) within the working class, a current or movement of actual men and women that links the lessons of the past—the revolutionary tradition—with the day-to-day struggle in the here-and-now. That is nine-tenths of what is meant by building a revolutionary party.

That movement did exist in much of the advanced world in the first few years after the Russian Revolution. It was called the Communist International and Comintern transformed working class politics around the globe. It was able to do this because the Russian working class had through the 1917 Revolution asked and answered the greatest question facing humanity in practice. Bolshevism became a serious current in many countries. The accumulated experience and wisdom of the world working class movement stood at an all-time high. The politics of working class self-emancipation was a practical proposition for millions of workers throughout the world. For this reason, practically and theoretically the first five years of the Communist International represent an indispensable starting point for re-

building that revolutionary current today.

The way ahead

The defeats inflicted upon the working class in the twenties and thirties and the consequent domination of working class politics by Stalinism and reformism, cast down authentic revolutionary Marxism to the fringes of society—which is where, by and large, it still stands today. The prospect of chronic and deepening crisis for capitalism—and state capitalism—worldwide, re-establishes the possibility of revolutionary politics. The authentic communist tradition must be uncovered from the distortions of Stalinism and reformism; from the elitist obscurantism of the marxologists; from the semi-religious formula-repeating of the “orthodox-Trotskyist” sectarians.

The revolutionary heart of Marxism is the necessity and capacity of the working class *themselves* to smash capitalism and build socialism. That means revolutionaries must shun substitutes and orientate on the working class. Ideas *do* influence activity. If there exists a short-cut, a sort of second-best alternative that gets round the need to patiently build in the working class with realistic perspectives, then

the political single-mindedness of Bolshevism will not be forthcoming. You need to be strong to withstand the gravitational pull of far more influential ideas than those of Marxism. If your bed-rock ideas are hazy or inconsistent, you won't manage it. The political trajectory of trends which claim to be socialist but which equivocate on the possibility of progress through some non-working class political movement, who allow for some half-solution not involving the actions of the working class—as those who reckon Russia and east Europe as some species of workers' state *must*—is a practical demonstration of this.

Lenin said there is no revolutionary practice without revolutionary theory. To *practically* begin the task of building a revolutionary party dedicated to the emancipation of the working class as the act of the working class means being consistent in the realm of ideas. This means rejecting the notion that Russia and similar regimes are in any way socialist or workers' states.

It means recognising that these societies are part of the world capitalist set-up. And capitalism everywhere is the enemy that workers must fight and and overcome.

—KEVIN WINGFIELD



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3 Women and socialism

The Socialist Workers Movement believes in socialism from below. That means workers, women and men, together controlling and making the decisions about every aspect of their lives. Therefore socialism must mean women's liberation too.

The oppression of women is everywhere evident. Women make up only 27% of the workforce in the 26 counties, 32% in the Six counties. North and South we are educated to see ourselves as housewives and mothers rather than workers. When women do work, we are paid about two-thirds of men's wages.

90% of part-time workers are women. This means that they have none of the benefits of employment protection legislation, maternity leave, pay-related benefits, etc.

Nowhere in the world do women have control even of their own bodies. There is no country in the world where women have automatic access to free, legal and safe contraception and abortion on demand. On this little island, abortion is totally illegal in the South and legal in limited cases only in the North.

Contraception is fairly easy to obtain in the South if you have money and is available free on the Health Service in the North, but the industries that produce contraceptives do so with profit rather than women's needs and health in mind. Thus the Pill remains a danger to women's health while "healthier" methods like caps and condoms are not as effective or as easy to use.

It can't be that women are denied adequate contraception and abortion simply to encourage them to have children. If this were so, the state would surely provide full childcare facilities. In fact, although 75% of working women are of child-bearing age, there are *no* state-funded nurseries in

the 26 counties while in the North only 28% of children are provided for.

With all this oppression weighing down on us, it's small wonder that many women accept the propaganda that we have no right to work outside the home, no right to sex outside marriage and no right to have children outside the family situation.

Even today, although more women work and become "independent", many are glad to escape from their poorly-paid jobs into the warmth and comfort of home and family. Being a housewife can give a woman a sense of worth and security that she doesn't get canning peas or putting microchips together for the boss. And it's obvious that in class society the family is often the "heart of a heartless world"—a shelter where we can find intimacy, sexual enjoyment and emotional fulfilment.

In spite of all this, it is through the family that the economic oppression of society is translated into the oppression of women. And in taking women away from the workplace and into the isolation of the home, they are removed from the only area where they have the collective strength to fight that oppression.

Fortunately, like most institutions, the family is not unchanging. Quite the opposite. Anyone who has looked through the history books that 13 and 14-year olds use at school will know that the family in, for example, feudal times was very different to the family of the industrial revolution in the last century. And at both these periods "family life" for the peasant or worker was very different indeed from that of the lord or factory owner.

This is because changes in the system by which goods are produced affect every aspect of human existence—including relations between women and men or adults or children.

For example, in feudal times, the peasant house-

hold was like a mini-factory producing all kinds of everything from bread, butter, cheese and meat to cloth, pots, pans and furniture. Everyone—mother, father, children—worked together at home, and on the land. When thousands of people were forced off the land and into the towns during the industrial revolution, all this changed drastically. Families hardly ever saw each other because they were working up to 18 hours a day. Women often had their babies between the machines in the factories. The new baby would be left with one of the children who was too young to work. Most kids started to work among the dangerous machinery of the mills and factories at five or six years of age.

As technology progressed the needs of capitalism changed. It no longer required little children to climb about the machinery, down mines or up chimneys. What came to be needed was a well-educated workforce which could handle complicated equipment and which would know about design, be able to read drawings, calculate angles, use computer-controlled machine tools or cash registers, operate word processors and programme computers. So over the last hundred years or so, children have gradually been getting more of a childhood so they can reach the level of education which capitalism now requires of workers.

Today the working class family ensures that the next generation of workers will be born and reared at the least possible cost to the system. The full responsibility for feeding, clothing and educating each child is left to the family. The state helps a little with the miserly children's allowance, but the myth of free education, for example, has long ago been seen as just that as parents have to shell out huge amounts of money for school uniforms, books, buses, etc.

It is also the family which keeps adults ready and able to work—feeding them, looking after them when they are sick etc. And the reason the average family is able to do all these things is that the mother sees it as "her duty". Usually the woman sees her primary role as housewife and mother—whether or not she works outside the home.

Things have always been different though for the families of the ruling and middle classes. In feudal times their children left home at an early age to live at the court of other noblemen. While children of five or six were working in factories beside their pregnant mothers, the women and children of the

bosses were always regarded as "delicate" by virtue of their age and sex, needing constant care and unable to lift a finger to pour their own tea. Today the role of women like Princess Di or Nancy Reagan or Mrs Smurfit is to produce "legitimate" heirs to their husband's wealth and power. Everything else is looked after by maids, nannies and expensive boarding schools.

But the family is not just about economics. It also has an important role in passing on ideas. So the idea that women are supposed to be passive-dependent and emotional comes through loud and clear from the mother's role in the family. And while girls are learning that this is how they should be, the boys are trained to be active, independent and protective—all the things that they are supposed to be.

One of the ideas which is most encouraged is that sex belongs only in the family set-up—or at least where there is the possibility of creating a family. That's why women aren't supposed to be sexual outside of serious relationships. All the ideological nonsense about sex-roles, seeing woman as virgin or whore, all the powerplay involved in pornography and rape, these are necessary to the continuation of the family, to the reproduction of labour with as little cost as possible to capital.

And because the ideology of the family is so strong, anyone who doesn't marry and raise a family is marked out as deviant. So the oppression of gay men and lesbians is a by-product of the oppression of women. Gay people break from all the stereotypes of man-woman relationships. That's why society makes them outcasts.

Socialists are against all oppression. Not just because we hate the misery it causes but because it divides workers—gay from heterosexual, black from white, women from men. It's in everybody's interests—men as well as women—to fight for women's liberation. And there can be no women's liberation without socialism. Women will be liberated only when the working class makes the revolution. Such a revolution would overthrow the material basis of women's oppression and lay the basis for freedom for women through the socialisation of housework and childcare, the provision of free, safe contraception and abortion, full employment, etc. For the vast majority of women there is no other road to freedom.

There is a theory—that of feminism—which says that men are the problem. This idea is encouraged by feminists pushing to the fore those areas where men are seen to be most clearly the agents of the oppression of women—rape, violence and pornography. Concentrating on these issues concentrates on women as *individual* victims of male oppression with little hope of change, instead of looking at fighting women, organised to win collective women's rights—abortion rights, nurseries, equal pay, etc.

To achieve socialism—and with it women's liberation—the working class needs the strength of unity. But in class society there is oppressed and oppressor everywhere: boss/worker, man/woman, white/black, hetero/gay. The system rules by dividing us. There is no inevitable way by which one oppressed group identifies with another or with the working class.

But as socialists, we identify with the struggles of all oppressed groups and try to break down these divisions.

We in the Socialist Workers Movement are on the same side as feminists. We support the demands of the women's movement and defend feminists from attacks by right-wingers who are really attacking women's rights, just like we defend republicans when they are attacked by the right. But in the end we know that just as republicanism cannot achieve a workers' republic, so feminism can never win women's liberation.

Therefore, for us, there is no such thing as a "woman's issue", rather there are class issues which particularly affect women. That is why we argue against separate organisation of women. An example of this came during the Anti Amendment Campaign when we ran a centre spread in *Socialist Worker* headed "Abortion—A Class Issue". This explained why we support a woman's right to choose abortion—in the context of class politics. This article showed how rich women always had access to safe abortion, whether legal or illegal, and how the whole abortion issue raises the basic question for socialists of "who controls?"

The feminist view of women's oppression and their way to fight it encourages the idea that all women must work together, that working class women have more in common with other women whatever their class than they do with working class men. Margaret Thatcher and her counterparts in this

country, Nuala Fennell, Gemma Hussey, Alice Glenn, etc. have shown this view to be a load of rubbish. Women are divided by their class interests just as much as men are—more so given how much more women have to gain from socialism.

Working class men too have much to gain from freedom for women. Sometimes it does not seem like that—as James Connolly pointed out, "the worker is the slave in capitalist society, the female worker is the slave of that slave". It would not seem to be in the slave's interest to lose his slave . . . But the working class man would lose nothing if good, collectively-operated canteens began to provide him with excellent meals. He would not suffer if a 24 hour nursery scheme took away from his wife the constant burden of worrying about the children.

Looked at like that it cannot be said that working class man has any material stake in the oppression of women. The advantages that he might have in the present set-up compared with his wife are nothing to what he would gain if the set-up was revolutionised. And as, at a time of revolution, workers began to exercise control over the whole of their lives, they would no longer need phoney feelings of control. So the man would stop needing to feel that however much he's kicked about at work, he's still master in his house. And the woman would stop needing to feel that however miserable her life generally, she's the boss when it comes to the kids. (Women's liberation would mean a better deal for the kids too!) And this isn't just theory developed to cheer up women socialists. When working class people start to fight for their rights the divisions between them—black/white, skilled/unskilled, man/woman begin to break down. They start to see how much stronger they are when not divided by the nonsense of ruling class ideas.

Women become conscious of their second class status and to start to fight against it. As one woman from the Relatives Action Committee in the North said:

"Probably the only good thing to come out of this heart-breaking war is the great change in the role of women. With things so bad we had to be active, and with that we've found a whole new identity for ourselves. No longer was the woman just a piece of property: your man's missus, your children's mother."

As we've come more and more to the forefront we've discovered our own strength and power."

And the men begin to see that it's better to have the women standing shoulder to shoulder with them in the struggle—on the picket line, in the occupations or whatever. For example, when the recent miners' strike started in Britain many of the miners were shouting crude sexist remarks at women supporters of the strike. As the strike progressed, the women of the mining communities—the wives, daughters, sisters and friends of the strikers—started to get involved. They were active on the picket lines, in the soup kitchens, on the delegations. The men soon changed their tune. On many picket lines, page 3 pin-ups were torn down by the strikers. On at least one picket they were replaced by the British Socialist Worker's articles on women's liberation.

The women who went on strike against Apartheid in Dunnes Stores knew that their pickets would have been more effective, taken more seriously, if it was eleven men on strike instead of ten women and one man. The double chains of the woman worker and the effect that her oppression has on workers' solidarity confronts them daily on the picket line. On the other hand the many trade unionists, male and female, who gave their support to the Dunnes strike can never again say that women don't take the union, or politics, seriously. These women are, after all, the first white workers in the world to strike against Apartheid in protest. Like the women whose march sparked off the Russian Revolution, they are streets ahead of most male workers.

Of course, the fact that women cannot have real liberation under capitalism does not mean that we should adopt a "wait until after the revolution, sisters" approach. That would be like saying that workers shouldn't demand higher wages because under capitalism those who produce the wealth cannot get a just return for their labour. That's why the SWM supports every and all the reforms which would make life under capitalism more bearable for the working class woman—higher wages, proper childcare facilities, free, legal and safe contraception and abortion on request, etc.

In "The Re-Conquest of Ireland" James Connolly summed up what should be every socialist's attitude to the fight for women's liberation. And he made it clear, how in the end, it would be won:

"None so fitted to break the chains as they who wear them, none so well equipped to decide what is a fetter. In its march towards freedom, the working class of Ireland must cheer on the efforts of those women who, feeling on their souls and bodies the fetters of ages, have arisen to strike them off, and cheer all the louder if in its hatred of thralldom and passion for freedom the women's army forges ahead of the militant army of Labour."

"But whosoever carries the outworks of the citadel of oppression, the working class alone can raise it to the ground."

—GORETTI HORGAN

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1640 to the present day
TONY CLIFF



4 Marxism and the national question

Marxists see the only possibility of fundamental progress being socialism—the emancipation of the working class as the act of the working class, as Marx put it. Marxists see differences of religion, race, sex, craft, etc as secondary. We look, therefore, to the possibility of uniting the working class to overthrow capitalism and workers' power. Yet workers in the six-counties are, not only not united, but deep hostility and sectarianism divides them. Socialists in Ireland must come to terms with this uncomfortable fact and find a political strategy to overcome it. Our starting point must therefore be an analysis of the six-county state and sectarianism.

All great political movements are expressions of class interests—at root economic interests. The Republican tradition from the time of Tone in the 1790s to the establishment of the two states in Ireland in 1921, represented the interests of the emerging native capitalist class in Ireland. For most of this period, it represented much else besides: the hope of keeping alive cultural traditions, a solution to the land question, and so on, which promised much to the mass of Irish people. But its prime significance was its promise of economic, political and social *progress*. Progress depended upon the development of the Irish economy. But this was fettered by its subordination to Britain. The restrictions on trade, commerce and manufacturing imposed by the British imperial parliament in the interests of the British ruling class blocked the development of Irish industry—"choked our rising commerce at every turn," as Wolfe Tone put it. This imperialist domination affected the mass of Irish people. In particular, it blocked the development of those Irish people who aspired to build up and direct native Irish industry—the emerging native bourgeoisie. If they could gain the opportunity they could take the leadership of the nation and,

through capitalist development, introduce a period of progress in Ireland.

The ideas that expressed their aspirations and ambitions were those that also expressed the aspirations and ambitions of their French and American opposite numbers. They had, too, encountered obstacles in the shape of Bourbon absolutism and English colonialism: the ideas which they developed were those of Republicanism. The central *political* republican doctrine to emerge from the French and American revolutions was that *the nation is sovereign*: that it is not the plaything of monarchs or imperialists but has the right to decide its own destiny. Its central *economic* category was *private property*. All would be free to dispose of their property as they liked, without regard to ancient privileges, local barons, tithes and particularist interferences typical of the *ancien regime*. In the Irish context the most consistent of the bourgeois republicans therefore sought to mobilise the nation under the "men of property" to secure separation from Britain and liberation from the imperialist yoke. This would open the way for tariff reform and the development of native Irish capitalism.

In the early years of this century, these were the ideas which inspired the formation of Arthur Griffith's Sinn Féin, the IRB, the Easter Rising and the War of Independence.

However, one section of "the nation" did not stand to gain from the implementation of this programme of separation. Around the Lagan valley and elsewhere in the north-east, local Protestant businessmen had established thriving industries—in particular linen, engineering and shipbuilding—which depended on the connection with Britain. Britain provided sources of finance, the Empire provided cheap raw materials and a ready market. Whereas *in general* the development of native Irish capit-

alism required protectionist measures—the erection of tariff barriers to keep out cheap imports from undermining local manufactures, the regulation of capital to maintain Irish control during the build-up period and so forth—these same measures would spell disaster to the Northern Unionist industrialists. They took steps to protect their position.

The Orange Order—superficially a religious Protestant organisation—had been formed over a century before to counter the agrarian agitation of poor Catholic peasants and early Republicanism. It had mobilised masses of rural Protestants—the descendants of the Ulster Plantation—in support of Ulster landowners. Declining throughout most of the nineteenth century, the Order was revitalised in the 1880s by the Ulster landowners in response to the Land League crisis and the threat of Home Rule. Essentially, it became an instrument in the hands of the Unionist bosses for mobilising masses of the Protestant poor. It managed to mobilise them by using the materials at hand—religious bigotry, the Plantation tradition and, most importantly, the ability of the Unionist bosses to employ fellow Protestants. The Unionist bosses were tied by family connections and traditions to powerful sections of the British ruling class. With allies in the British establishment, the Protestant masses signing Carson's covenant, the threat *in extremis* of rebellion, the Unionist bosses hoped to fend off separation or even limited Home Rule.

The outcome is well-known. Having measured forces in the War of Independence, the Treaty settlement partitioned the country. The Southern bourgeoisie split on the question of whether on the one hand full political separation was necessary to satisfy their economic aspirations or whether, on the other hand, Dominion status provided “the freedom to win freedom” and for a period the Southern bosses should remain middle-men for Britain. Partition, contrary to myth, was *not* the issue that provoked the Civil War. The Second Dail Treaty debates contain scarcely a mention of it. And meanwhile the Unionists in the North were busy consolidating their position.

If the history of the preceding period had taught the Unionist bosses one thing it was that they could not depend on their allies in the British ruling class to save them from an independent Ireland indefinitely. Sections of the British ruling class had seen their own long-term interests being served by, if

not alliance, then remaining on good terms with the Southern bourgeoisie. Moreover, had not a Liberal government in London been prepared to sell Home Rule out of political expedience? (Their parliamentary majority had depended on concessions to the Irish Parliamentary Party) In addition, a Civil War raged across the border and poor Catholics in the North were sympathetic to the more militant Republicans in the South—understandably, in view of the Protestant-backlash mobilisation that had secured the Union for the six-counties. Nobody imagined that the last word had been spoken on the subject. The Unionist bosses took steps to entrench their mass base.

The Orange machine and sectarianism

When the Orange Order had been revived in the 1880s the slogan was “stand by our colours ‘The Orange and the Blue’ with the good old union jack and let us drive popery and radicalism before us as we have done many a time before and hope to do many a time again”. But in spite of continuity there was change. In 1795 the Order had been a means of mobilising a numerous Protestant tenant-farmer class in Ulster in support of Ulster landowners, and later to fight the '98 rebellion. By 1886 the Protestant masses, many of them workers in Belfast for example, were being mobilised in support of Protestant *capitalists*. And the political party of Protestant capital—Unionism—cemented links with the Order. It was a mass movement. Thousands of Protestants signed Carson's covenant and enlisted in the Ulster Volunteers, organised by the Ulster Unionist Council. The object of the exercise was for the Ulster Unionist capitalists to mobilise the weight of Protestant masses, armed with guns from Larne, Bangor and Donaghadee, distributed from Unionist party offices, organised by retired Indian army general and British Tory, Sir George Richardson, to smash the Home Rule compromise which the Liberal government was making with the aspiring Southern bourgeoisie. Powerful allies in the British ruling class supported their cause. Bona Law, leader of the Conservative opposition in London, was moved to utter these distinctly unparliamentary sentiments in 1912: The Liberal government, he said was a

“... Revolutionary Committee which has seized upon despotic power by fraud... There are things stronger than parliamentary

majorities." He went on to specify:

"If an attempt was made to deprive these men [Ulster Protestants] of their birthright—as part of a corrupt parliamentary bargain—they would be justified in resisting such an attempt with all the means in their power, including force . . . I can imagine no length of resistance to which Ulster can go in which I would not be prepared to support them..."

The "Curragh Mutiny" in 1913 demonstrated that ruling class solidarity extended to sections of the officer corps. But other elements within the British ruling class wanted to do a deal. Unable to be *certain* that the section of the British ruling class which supported them would be the decisive section, the Unionist bosses depended crucially on the mobilisation of thousands of Protestant workers to tip the balance. At that point the Great War came to the rescue.

The War of Independence reopened the question. By 1920 a crescendo of sectarianism had been orchestrated by the Unionists and, after the IRA had shot RIC officers, a full-scale program was undertaken. Organised by the Ulster Unionist Labour Association—a working class Unionist front led by the Ulster Prime Minister-to-be Andrews—up to 10,000 Catholics were driven from the shipyards, engineering works and linen mills of Belfast. Protestant socialists and trade union militants were expelled too. Attacks were mounted on Catholic enclaves in Belfast. A month later Catholics were driven from Banbridge and Lisburn and Belfast ghettos were again attacked. At the same time the Protestants were armed. A Special Constabulary was raised with British approval—ostensibly to free British troops to fight in the South—consisting of over ten thousand armed men, recruited in Orange Halls and incorporating the UVF. At its height about one in five Protestant males were in the Specials. The "B Specials" remained organised and armed—the shock troops of Orange reaction, for the next fifty years.

With the founding of the Northern Ireland state and Civil War in the South, sectarian murders and assaults on Catholics in the North escalated. Under pressure from the British government—who feared the programs might endanger the Treaty settlement in the South—the NI government agreed to

discuss with middle class Catholic representatives the possibility of recruiting Catholics to the RUC and Special Constabulary. This provoked a hail of protest from Orange opinion and at its second meeting the Catholic representatives of the Catholic Recruiting Committee were arrested. Three escaped and were forced "on the run". Catholics drew the conclusion that they could not look for protection against sectarian attacks to the forces of the state—the same forces who themselves were implicated in many of the murders. The Nationalist MPs withdrew from the NI Parliament.

If the new NI state had served notice in blood that Catholics could expect only Protestant law and order from the new Protestant state, in the sphere of jobs and housing things were no better.

Built into the NI state from the outset—the instrument of the local owners of the Linen, Shipbuilding and Engineering industries—was the mechanism that consolidated Protestant support—sectarianism. The Unionist bosses owned the local industry, they employed predominantly Protestant workers to keep them loyal. They ran the state, centrally and in local government. The local councils in turn rewarded their Protestant supporters with jobs and housing. By restricting the building of new Corporation housing, for example, fewer Catholics would become householders, and would therefore be excluded from electoral rolls. The build-up in infra-structure which attracted new industry was concentrated in predominantly Protestant areas.

This supplied the material basis of loyalism. Nearly a quarter of the male Protestant adult population of the Six counties were members of the Orange Order. Every Prime Minister of NI for fifty years was a member. So too were the Ministers. As were Unionist councillors who enjoyed permanent majorities in local Corporations and councils. Plus the senior Civil Servants, the majority of the RUC and, of course, the Specials.

For all practical purposes, the Orange machine *was* the state. Everybody knows of the benefits accruing to Communist Party members in the Stalinist states of Eastern Europe with Party shops, advancement in jobs, holidays in the best resorts, etc. But nowhere has Party membership in these states

penetrated so far into the mass of the population as Orangeism in Northern Ireland. It was a network that Protestants were born into and from which Catholics were excluded.

There was an implied bargain: In return for loyalty to the Unionist bosses, Protestants had first place in the queue for jobs, housing and all the benefits at the disposal of the state. Orange ideology and traditions, Protestant exclusivity and religious bigotry, the images of the Battle of the Boyne and bowler hats, these were the icing on the cake. In material terms, what sustained the machine was the direct, day to day experience of Protestant supremacy.

There were times when the ideology of working class Orangeism appeared set to crumble—most dramatically in 1932 when Catholic and Protestant unemployed workers rioted together in Belfast against cuts in Outdoor Relief. But within a year or so, sectarian attacks on Catholics were once more visited upon the Falls.

The consequence was that although Protestant workers enjoyed privileges over Catholics, they suffered consistently worse housing conditions, wage rates and unemployment relative to other cities in the UK.

The changing needs of capitalism

Orangeism in the twentieth century was the instrument by which the local owners of industry in the North mobilised masses of workers in support of continued union with Britain. The economic policies which the emergent capitalists in the South required to build up industry—typified by de Valera's 1932-38 policies of economic nationalism—constituted a knife to the jugular of Engineering, Shipbuilding and Linen in the North whose prosperity depended on free access to British markets, etc. The Orange agents of imperialism received support and encouragement from the rulers in Britain, no longer divided over Ireland but united in recognition of the military, economic and political advantages of maintaining a bridge-head in Ireland.

By the 1960s however things were changing. In the South, the limits of an economy supplying a small home market from protected manufacturing industry had been reached. The fifties had

witnessed a deep and stagnant slump in the 26 Counties with high unemployment and emigration. The world boom was leaving the Republic behind and powerful voices were raised in support of a change of course. The Lemass/Whitaker policy of 1959 marks the turning point. Over the next few years tariff barriers and restrictions of capital movements were progressively removed. Foreign capital was encouraged through tax and other incentives and the creation of bodies like the IDA. The first effect of this was greatly increased trade with, and capital inflow from Britain. The bosses in the South and those in Britain drew closer together. In time the preponderance of this link with the British economy was to decline as American, German and Japanese capital came to assume greater importance and the British economy declined in world terms. It was during this period that the central antagonism between the British and Southern Irish ruling classes was liquidated.

At the same time the traditional industries of the six-counties were in irreversible decline. The dynamic elements in the Northern economy were no longer locally owned linen, shipbuilding and engineering but, increasingly, "modern" industries like synthetic fibres. The owners of these industries were multi-national corporations with no organic or historical link with Unionism or Protestantism. Du Pont, Chemstrand, ICI and the rest were not interested in the religion of their workers or with ancient antagonisms with the South. As an economic force, the Unionist bosses were less and less important—they increasingly became middlemen for multi-national capital.

These processes effectively undermined the material basis for the border—the Northern Ireland Development Board and the Irish Development Authority were both pursuing the same objectives—indeed out-bidding each other in the inducements they offered to foreign capital to set up in their territories. When Brookeborough had told Free State Ministers in the thirties: "We are too small to stay apart for long" it was a prophetic if uncharacteristic comment. By the sixties everything pointed in the same direction.

Britain had every reason to encourage a rapprochement between North and South. The strategic im-

portance of its occupation of part of Ireland was very much less now that the withdrawal from East of Suez and the "Winds of Change" signalled the erosion of British imperialism's independent role and its subordination to that of the USA. In any event, with the final liquidation of conflict between Britain and Ireland, it could be confidently expected that a 32-county Republic would quickly abandon old shibboleths and take her place in a west European alliance under US domination.

These processes found their reflection in ruling circles in the North. "O'Neillite Unionism" was the recognition by sections of the Northern boss class that with less and less specifically Northern economic interests to defend—being more and more agents of multi-national capital—their long-term position could only be safeguarded by "modernising" the Northern state—progressively dismantling the archaic institutionalised features of sectarianism, gerrymandering etc—and drawing closer to the South. The O'Neill-Lemass talks of 1966 were an important landmark on the road to 1968.

Attitudes were changing too among the Catholic minority. From the foundation of the NI state, with the exception of a tiny layer of entrepreneurs who had found a niche within the six-county set-up, the experience of Catholics had been gerrymandering, discrimination, occasional pogroms and repression. It had been widely assumed that nothing could be done about this situation short of reunification. Catholic participation in the body-politic had been systematically obstructed so that even right wing Nationalists, after one or two abortive efforts, made no attempt to incorporate themselves into the constitutional apparatus. Every looked to developments in the South. However the processes at work in the sixties with "liberal Unionism" opening lines of communication to respectable middle class Catholics rekindled hopes that perhaps the six-county state could be made habitable for the minority. Militant Republicanism the only force that excluded such a possibility—became marginalised and in 1968 Civil Rights agitation took centre stage.

The reaction

Marxists hold that widely-held ideas are at root expressions of economic interests. Whilst this

proposition is true, the vulgar-marxist variant—that all ideas simply and directly correspond to objective interests—is false to the core. For most of the time, capitalism finds support or at least acquiescence from the workers. False consciousness exists. Just because the material conditions that had called the border and Orange sectarianism into existence had passed away, this did not automatically mean that these institutions would collapse like a tent deprived of its pole. But, as we have seen, Orangeism organised directly perhaps a quarter of Protestant adult males together with the bosses. It united the Protestant community with sectarian ideology and materially supported itself on the marginal privileges disbursed to the faithful. Possibly unique—certainly so among European democracies—this is not something that could be easily wound up and packaged away when it had served its purpose. The history of the six-counties since 1968 is well enough known: O'Neill moves—under pressure from Civil Rights agitation, modernising businessmen and Britain—to make small reforms. Sensing the attack on their marginal privileges implied in some diminution of institutionalised sectarianism, a plebeian Protestant backlash ensues. O'Neill falls. Chichester-Clark replaces him and grapples with the same dilemma. He too falls. Faulkner, with the record of an Orange bully-boy, also falls. British troops move in, Local Government is re-organised, Catholics burnt out, Internment, Bloody Sunday, Direct Rule, Power Sharing, UWC strike—a depressing treadmill of reaction. In retrospect it was all so predictable.

All Protestant workers have are their marginal privileges, their sense of being a cut above their Catholic neighbours and of the same stock as landowners and capitalists. British gutlessness, intrigues in Dublin and sell-out politicians were, it seemed, proposing to demote them to the position of mere Taigs. Unsurprisingly, they reacted savagely and intransigently. Working class Catholics, raised to their feet in 1968-69 at the appearance of having unblocked a drain that had festered for half a century faced RUC and sectarian attacks. The NI state could not contain the centrifugal forces. British troops were mobilised to "assist the civil authority". It was widely thought they had come to protect the minority from the onslaught. They had not. They had come to hold the state together and that meant demobilising the Catholics. That required

attacking Catholic resistance to winding back the clock. From that point on war was inevitable. The only political force in the ghettos that had all along recognised and adumbrated the futility of attempting to reform the NI state was the Republicans.

Republicanism

The Republican Movement sees itself as the continuation of a movement that can be traced back to Wolfe Tone. They claim loyalty to the ideas that inspired Tone and the rising of 1798.

Given the constant repetition of this claim, there is no reason not to believe its sincerity. As we have seen, those ideas were the expression of the class view point of the emergent native Irish bourgeoisie. And very progressive and revolutionary they were in their time too. But whereas the American and French revolutionary movements which showed those ideas were successful and gave rise to Republics (of which Reagan and Mitterand are today's heirs), by the close of the bourgeoisie's period of ascendancy the essential tasks of the bourgeois revolution in Ireland had not been completed. The heart of the problems is that in 1789, 1798, etc, the bourgeoisie were a revolutionary class because their class rule could open up a whole historical period of progress freed from the fetters of the *ancien regime*. But as time goes on, capitalism—even capitalism enfeebled by imperialist domination—creates its own grave-digger—the working class. The later in history the showdown between the national bourgeoisie and its oppressors is postponed, the less single-minded, the more half-hearted and compromising the bourgeoisie becomes. This is because it has to fear the possibility that a decisive revolutionary struggle will raise the working class to its feet. And once so raised workers are unlikely to submit to subordination to capitalist rule. Moreover, native capitalism grows up in the interstices of the old social order—whether it be feudalism or imperialism—and the longer the decisive struggle postponed, the more the native bourgeoisie will have adapted itself to, cemented ties with and compromised with the old order, corroding its capacity for resolute, single minded revolutionary action. This was evident as early as the European

revolutionary wave of 1848. After the unsuccessful 1905 revolution in Russia against Tsarist absolutism Trotsky was moved to formulate his theory of Permanent Revolution (borrowing its name from Marx's writings on the 1848 revolutions).

Generalising from the Russian case, where the bourgeoisie were hopelessly compromised before Tsarism and fearful of the workers, he argued that in modern times the bourgeoisie would *not* take an independently revolutionary course when faced with the tasks of the bourgeois revolution. On the contrary, *only the workers* had the capacity for an uncompromising fight to accomplish the bourgeois revolution. And, having taken the head of the nation, the workers would not stop short at bourgeois measures but would begin on the road of constructing socialism. The 1917 Revolution in Russia was a splendid confirmation of this theory. Subsequent history was to establish the unconditional correctness of the first proposition—the unrevolutionary nature of the bourgeoisie when faced with even severe blocks on their road. The second proposition, naturally, depends on the organisation and cohesiveness of the working class and its leadership which have usually been deficient.

The question of how the anti-imperialist struggle in the North has crystalised around a movement upholding a bourgeois ideology can now be answered. Individual marxists played a central role in the Civil Rights agitation around 1968. However there existed no Marxist party organised amongst workers North and South on the basis of opposition to the set-up North and South.

Fairly obviously, the only politics that could stand a hope of making some impression on the situation were politics that proclaimed the irreformability of the Orange state, that sought to undercut Protestant workers support for sectarianism by the prospect of serious improvement in their situation that only an all-Ireland revolutionary socialist perspective could offer, that could integrate armed offence of the ghettos with a mass working class struggle.

The perspective of Marxists in the North was building a revolutionary current through Civil Rights agitation that stopped short of challenging

the existence of the border. Revolutionaries must always support workers struggling for "partial demands" which stop short of the revolutionary programme because it is only on the basis of the sectional, limited struggle in the here-and-now that workers can be won to revolutionary marxism. But here socialists were deliberately *downplaying* the National Question in a situation where the Six county state could not deliver even the Civil Rights' "practical demands". It was inevitable that so long as this perspective remained, sooner or later the socialists would be pushed to the sidelines. The only force arguing the irreformable nature of the Orange state were the Provos. As the war got underway the experience of masses of Catholic workers came more and more to confirm the Provos analysis. Notwithstanding the incapacity of the programme of Republicanism to provide a way out or resolution of the crisis in the North, their consistent rejection of the Northern State put them in the vanguard of resistance. Masses of working class youth have streamed into the Provos over the past decade and a half. For the first time in its history Republicanism is now a predominantly working class movement. Its rhetoric and propaganda has reflected this working class base in its concern and the movement has moved very much to the left. This has misled some Marxists into believing that Republicanism can be changed, bit by bit, into socialism. Not so. Republicanism is *essentially* still a bourgeois ideology. It cannot be anything else. But it has no support from the bourgeoisie who have no argument with Britain. It is at root a set of

political principles that have not changed in essence since Tone's day.

There is a paradox about the Republicans' move to the left in this situation. Their ideology denies that *only* the working class can defeat imperialism in our time. But the experience of the last 15 years is that only the working class is available for recruitment to anti-imperialist struggle. As a result their approach to the working class is inconsistent and incoherent. One day Gerry Adams talks about reasserting the politics of Connolly and "the cause of labour being the cause of Ireland". Next day he talks about "pan-nationalist interests" —i.e., the common interests of nationalists of all classes. While pushed towards the left and towards the working class the Provos cannot break cleanly and finally from a set of ideas which put the working class in a subsidiary position. To do that they would have to break with republicanism itself.

The SWM is entirely in favour of anti-imperialist struggle. We are in no way neutral between the Provos and the Brits. We are 100 percent with the Provos. But we recognise that their struggle is not the socialist struggle, that it cannot be transformed into the socialist struggle and that it cannot, therefore, defeat imperialism at the end of the day.

The task is to build a revolutionary working-class party which can lead towards the defeat of imperialism by basing itself squarely on specifically working class interest and the day-to-day struggles of the working class itself.

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